

Coronavirus briefing: safeguarding guidance and information

Going to school

Who has to go to school?

Across the UK, schools are closed except to provide care and education to children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are key workers.

Who are vulnerable children?

In England, vulnerable children are those who have a social worker and those aged up to 25 with education, health and care (EHC) plans. This includes children who have a child protection plan or are looked after.

Children may also be deemed vulnerable if they have been assessed as being in need or meet the definition in section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (Department for Education (DfE) and Public Health England (PHE), 2020).

Do all vulnerable children need to go to school?

In England, children with a social worker are expected to go to school, provided they don't have an underlying health condition that puts them at severe risk.

What if parents of vulnerable children don't want to send them to school?

In England, social workers and schools should work with parents of vulnerable children who don't want their children to go to school. Social workers and schools should explore the reasons for this and encourage parents to allow their children to attend (DfE and PHE, 2020).

Who are key workers?

In England, Northern Ireland and Wales, key workers are those whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response. This includes those working in the following sectors:

- Health and social care including doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers and staff required to maintain the health and social care sector.
- Education and childcare including teachers, support staff, social workers and specialist education staff.
- Local and national government including only those administrative occupations essential to the delivery of the COVID-19 response or delivering essential public services.
- Food and other necessary goods including those involved in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery, and those involved in the provision of hygienic and veterinary medicines.
- Public safety and national security including police, support staff, contractor and armed forces personnel, fire and rescue service employees, those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles.
- Transport including those who will keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating and those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass.
- Utilities, communication and financial services including those working in banks and building societies, the oil, gas, water and electricity sectors, the information technology and data infrastructure sector, the civil nuclear, chemicals and telecommunications sectors, postal and delivery services, payment providers and waste disposal.
- Other workers essential to key public services (Cabinet Office and DfE, 2020; Department of Education, 2020b; Welsh Government, 2020c).

In England and Wales, “workers essential to key public services” includes:

- those essential to the running of the justice system
- religious staff

- charities and workers delivering key frontline services
- those responsible for the management of the deceased
- journalists and broadcasters

(Cabinet Office and DfE, 2020; Welsh Government, 2020c).

What if one parent is a key worker but another is not?

Guidance in all nations states that wherever possible, children should be cared for at home.

In England and Northern Ireland, children can go to school if only one parent is a key worker. But if children can be cared for at home they should be (DfE, 2020f;

Department of Education, 2020a).

Should schools stay open over the Easter holiday?

Across the UK, schools and childcare settings should stay open over the Easter holidays where possible, for children who are vulnerable and whose parents are key workers (DfE, 2020e; Department of Education, 2020a; Scottish Government, 2020a; Welsh Government, 2020f).

Safeguarding and child protection

What changes should be made to schools' safeguarding policies and procedures?

In England, schools and colleges should continue to follow the statutory guidance,

Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE) (DfE, 2020g). Schools and colleges should review their child protection policy and revise it in line with current circumstances. A COVID-19 annexe or addendum may be more appropriate than re-writing the whole policy. Staff and volunteers should be made aware of

the new policy and kept up to date if it is revised. The policy should also be made available publicly (DfE, 2020e).

What happens if nominated child protection leads need to self-isolate or become ill?

In England, where it is not possible for a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or deputy to be on site, a trained DSL should be contactable via phone or online video. This could be the school's own DSL if they are working from home or a shared DSL or deputy from another school. If a trained DSL or deputy is not on site, a senior leader should take responsibility for co-ordinating safeguarding on site (DfE, 2020e).

Can children who aren't defined as vulnerable but who may be at risk go to school?

In England, the guidance states that leaders of educational settings and designated safeguarding leads will know who their most vulnerable children are. Schools have the flexibility to offer places to children who are "on the edge" of receiving support from children's social care (DfE and PHE, 2020).

What information should be shared if children need to attend a different school to normal?

In England, the guidance states that some schools may not be able to remain open due to staff shortages and children will need to attend a different setting (DfE, 2020f).

For looked after children, any change in setting should be managed by the virtual school head (VSH) with responsibility for the child (DfE, 2020e).

Schools should provide relevant child protection and welfare information to the alternative setting, before the child arrives or as soon as possible afterwards.

Information should be shared between designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) and special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) as relevant. If this is not possible, senior leaders should take responsibility (DfE, 2020e).

Do staff moving between schools need a safeguarding induction?

In England, staff may be moving between schools and colleges to ensure appropriate staff levels during the pandemic. Schools receiving existing staff from other schools should assess on a case-by-case basis the level of safeguarding induction needed.

(DfE, 2020e).

Child welfare

How should schools and childcare settings implement social distancing measures?

In England the Department for Education (DfE) has published guidance on social distancing for schools and childcare settings. This sets out measures schools should take to minimise the risk of transmission of coronavirus whilst ensuring children are being well cared for (DfE, 2020d).

How should schools look after children's mental health and wellbeing?

In England, teachers should be mindful of the current circumstances and how they are affecting children and families when they are setting expectations of children's work at home. Existing provision for mental health support for children and young people may be delivered through different means, for example over the phone (DfE, 2020e).

Will children face stigma if they attend school because they're vulnerable?

In England, guidance states that the majority of children attending school at the moment will be there because their parents are key workers. This means vulnerable children should not be easily identifiable by their peers (DfE and PHE, 2020).

What should schools do about free school meals?

In England, schools should continue to provide free school meals to all eligible children through either meals or food parcels from their usual catering team or supermarket vouchers through the new national scheme (DfE, 2020c).

Can children still see both parents if their parents are separated?

Across the UK, people must comply with social distancing guidelines. However the guidelines state that where parents do not live in the same household, children under 18 can move between their parents' homes (Cabinet Office, 2020; Scottish Government, 2020c; Welsh Government, 2020g).

In England, Cafcass has published guidance on co-parenting and contact arrangements. This states that children should maintain their usual routine of spending time with each of their parents unless doing so would put the child, parents or others at risk (Cafcass, 2020).

In England and Wales, guidance from the Courts and Tribunals Judiciary states that separated parents should communicate with each other and decide what would be a good, practical solution to maintaining the conditions of child arrangement orders during the pandemic. If one parent is sufficiently concerned that complying with child arrangement orders would be against current public health advice, they may change the arrangement to one they feel is safe. If a child does not get to spend time with one of their parents as set out in the child arrangement order, alternative arrangements should be made to maintain regular contact. This could be through video call or telephone (Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, 2020).

How to implement social distancing

To help ensure that the risk of virus spread for both staff and children is as low as possible, education and childcare settings that remain open should:

- tell children, parents, carers or any visitors, such as suppliers, not to enter the education or childcare setting if they are displaying any symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- consider how children arrive at the education or childcare setting, and reduce any unnecessary travel on coaches, buses or public transport
- ensure class sizes reflect the numbers of teaching staff available and are kept as small as possible
- stagger lunch times, break times, and the movement of pupils around the school, to reduce large groups of children gathering
- discourage parents from gathering at school gates
- try to follow the social distancing guidelines

Social distancing within education and childcare settings with very young children will be harder to maintain. Staff should implement the above measures as far as they are able, whilst ensuring children are kept safe and well cared for within their settings.

We are asking you to:

think about how the above can be implemented in your education or childcare setting make sure anyone who is feeling ill stays at home (for residential special schools and colleges, this means self-isolating as a school or college 'household' if a resident is ill). See the guidance on isolation for residential educational settings

ensure all staff and children:

- wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds frequently
- are encouraged not to touch their faces
- use a tissue or elbow to cough or sneeze and use bins for tissue waste
- ensure help is available for children and young people who have trouble washing their hands

- inform parents and communities about the measures that you are taking and get their help to implement them, including ensuring they have seen the parent Q&A
- engage parents and children in education resources such as e-bug and PHE schools resources
- increase cleaning of surfaces in classrooms, including desks and handles, and within toilet blocks and changing rooms, adhering to guidance on cleaning of non-healthcare settings
- for children and young people with an EHC plan, work with the local authority as well as with parents to decide how best to continue supporting these children and young people to stay healthy

The Department for Education (DfE) will work with schools, childcare settings, and local authorities, to ensure that adequate supplies of personal and domestic cleaning products are available to schools. We will issue further detailed guidance for settings regarding the supply of personal protective equipment to settings that require it.

We know that education and childcare settings may face additional costs as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19). We will put in place a new process that allows us to reimburse schools for exceptional costs that they face as a result.

What parents can do:

talk to their children about coronavirus (COVID-19), social distancing and handwashing follow guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection do not gather at entrances or in playgrounds, and model social distancing so that their children learn good practice

Social distancing

Q: What does effective social distancing involve in practice in educational settings?

As much as possible, children, young people and staff should be spaced apart at all times.

This means:

- sitting children at desks that are far apart
- ensuring everyone queues and eats further apart than normal
- keeping apart when in the playground or doing any physical exercise
- visiting the toilet one after the other
- staggering break times
- putting guidelines on the floor in corridors
- avoiding unnecessary staff gatherings

These measures are very difficult to achieve with primary aged children. We are mindful of the above but also mindful of the needs and circumstances within our school.

Social distancing measures should also be in place when providing meals, or food for collection, from families of free school meal pupils not in school.

This approach also applies to further education settings, including for learners who may be taking part in practical learning. Clear messaging to young people attending the setting about the purpose of social distancing, and personal hygiene, is likely to be particularly important.